

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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Policy Statement

Fencing Ireland is fully committed to safeguarding the well-being of all members. Every individual should at all times show respect and understanding for members' rights, safety and welfare and conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of the organisation and the guidelines contained in the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport.

Introduction

Fencing Ireland believes that:

- the welfare of any child is paramount
- anyone, whatever their age, gender, family status, religion, disability, and/or race (including race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins) has the right to protection from abuse
- all suspicions and allegations of abuse and poor practice must and will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately

As the organisation recognised by the international federation, as being responsible for the administration of our sport, we are responsible for overseeing the adoption and the implementation of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport, by our members. To maximise compliance with the Code, as set out in Section 2.6 we shall:

- ensure that the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport is adopted, agreed to, implemented and signed up to by all members.
- amend, as necessary, our Constitution to reflect a safe and clearly defined method of recruiting, selecting and managing.
- appoint a National Children's Officer/Designated Person. S/he will be a member of the Executive Committee or have ease of access to attend meetings when required.
- ensure that effective disciplinary, complaints and appeals procedures are in place.
- have in place procedures for dealing with a concern or complaint made to the Statutory Authorities against a committee member or a Sports Leader. Regulations should stipulate that a Sports Leader who is the subject of an allegation, which has been reported to the Statutory Authorities, should stand aside while the matter is being examined. S/he should be invited to resume full duties when and if appropriate internal disciplinary procedures are completed.
- ensure that all sports clubs with child members are fully affiliated and signed up to the Fencing Ireland constitution.
- be represented by appropriate personnel at all education/training workshops dealing with the Code.
- where children are involved in representative teams, designate an appropriate senior officer within Fencing Ireland as the person with responsibility for following the guidelines of the Code.
- review our child protection procedures regularly through open discussion with our members, Sports Councils and Statutory Authorities.
- promote contact with representatives of the Statutory Authorities. The building of these relationships will contribute to the creation of an environment in which education and knowledge of child protection issues and procedures are widely known.
- examine and take appropriate action in response to any reports or observations of unusual incidents (high rate of transfers, dropouts) received from clubs.

Everyone in the Irish Fencing Community has a duty of care to safeguard children involved in activities from harm. Everyone has a right to protection, and the needs of disabled children and others who may be particularly vulnerable must be considered. Fencing Ireland will do their utmost to ensure the safety and protection of all everyone involved in any fencing activity whether that is at clubs, events competition, trips, activity sessions or anywhere else that fencing takes place.

Definitions

Child: For the purposes of these policies, a child is any person under 18 years of age.

Position of Trust: refers to anyone with a position of responsibility over a child.

Sports Leaders: For the purpose of this Code and all associated policies, all adults involved in children's sport are referred to as Sports Leaders. All have a role to play in ensuring that procedures as described in the Code are put in place, agreed, followed and reviewed on a regular basis. The principal leadership roles (some of which overlap) include the following:

- **Club/Organisation Officers:** President, Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee members are appointed to oversee club activities and the development of the club/organisation.
- **Administrators:** While administrators may not be actively involved in children's sport, they may be involved in organising activities and events.
- **Coach/Trainer:** A coach is a person who assists the young participant to develop his or her skills and abilities in a progressive way.
- **Instructor:** Instructors are involved in the systematic development of the core skills and abilities of an activity, sometimes in a non-competitive context.
- **Mentor:** A mentor is an individual who undertakes an overseeing role with a group of participants under 18 years of age, often in co-operation with other mentors.
- **Selector:** A selector is an individual who has responsibility for the selection of participants under 18 years of age for teams and events.
- **Official:** An official is an individual charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the rules of an activity are adhered to in a formal way. This category includes referees, DTs, armoury, etc.
- **Assistants:** Assistants are those people who provide back-up to any of the roles outlined in this section and often such assistants are involved on an intermittent basis (e.g. provision of lifts to matches or competitions; checking equipment, etc).

Definitions of Abuse

There are four main types of abuse. These are:

Physical Abuse – this may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. Examples of physical abuse in sport may be when a child is forced into training and competition that exceeds the capacity of his or her immature and growing body; or where a child is given drugs to enhance performance or delay puberty.

Sexual Abuse – involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non- penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. In sport, coaching techniques that involve physical contact with children can potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. The power of the coach over young performers, if misused, may also lead to abusive situations developing.

Emotional Abuse – is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone. Examples of emotional abuse in sport include subjecting children to constant criticism, name calling, and sarcasm or bullying. Putting them under consistent pressure to perform to unrealistically high standards is also a form of emotional abuse.

Neglect – the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing or shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- Protect a child from physical harm and emotional harm or danger
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care – givers)
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs.

Examples of neglect in sport could include: not ensuring children are safe; exposing them to undue cold or heat, or exposing them to unnecessary risk of injury.

Child Abuse Concerns

Signs of Child Abuse

Signs of abuse can be physical, behavioural or developmental.

A cluster or pattern of signs is the most reliable indicator of abuse. Indicators should be noted. It is important, however, to realise that all of these indicators can occur in other situations where abuse has not been a factor, and that the list is not exhaustive.

CATEGORY	Indicators	
ABUSE	Physical	Behavioural
PHYSICAL	Unexplained bruising in soft tissue areas Bites, burns and scalds	Becoming withdrawn or aggressive Reluctance to change clothing
EMOTIONAL	Drop in performance Crying	Regressive behaviour Excessive clinginess
NEGLECT	Weight loss Untreated fractures	Changes in attendance Reluctance to go home
SEXUAL	Torn or bloodstained clothing Inappropriate sexual awareness, behaviour or language	Distrustful of adults Sudden drop in performance

Responding to Disclosure, Suspicions and Allegations

Fencing Ireland accepts that organisations which include young people among its members are vulnerable to the occurrence of child abuse. Below are the procedures for dealing with any welfare or protection issue that may arise. Child welfare and the protection of young people is the concern of all adults at all times, irrespective of their role within the organisation.

If there are grounds for concern about the safety or welfare of a young person you should react to the concern. Persons unsure about whether or not certain behaviours are abusive and therefore reportable, should contact the Club Children's Officer or the National Children's Officer. Grounds for concern include a specific indication from a child, a statement from a person who witnessed abuse or an illness, injury or behaviour consistent with abuse.

A report may be made by any member in the club but should be passed on to the Designated Person, who may in turn have to pass the concern to the local Statutory Authorities. It is not the responsibility of anyone working within Fencing Ireland, in a paid or voluntary capacity, or those working in affiliated organisations, to take responsibility or to decide whether or not child abuse is taking place. That is the job of the local Statutory Authorities. However, there is a responsibility to protect children by assisting the

appropriate agencies so that they can then make enquiries and take any necessary action to protect the young person.

Everyone should follow the procedures outlined below, firstly the procedure for responding to a child in distress and secondly the procedure for reporting the concern.

Response to a Child Disclosing Abuse

When a young person discloses information of suspected abuse you should:

- deal with any allegation of abuse in a sensitive manner through listening to the child rather than interviewing the child about details of what happened.
- stay calm and not show any extreme reaction to what the child is saying. Listen compassionately and take what the child is saying seriously.
- understand that the child has decided to tell something very important and has taken a risk to do so. The experience of telling must be a positive one so that the child will continue to trust in adults involved in the investigation.
- make no judgmental statements about the person whom the allegation is made against.
- not question the child unless the nature of what he or she is saying is unclear. Leading questions should be avoided. Open, non-specific questions should be used such as “Can you explain to me what you mean by that”.
- check out the concerns with the parents or guardians before making a report unless doing so would endanger the child or compromise an investigation.
- be honest and tell the child that it is not possible to keep information a secret.
- give the child some indication of what would happen next, such as informing parents or guardians, the Health Service Executive or Social Services. The child may have been threatened and may feel vulnerable so may not want you to inform any other adult. Listen to the child’s concerns but reassure them that this is a necessary step and will help to keep them safe.
- carefully record the details.
- reassure the child that they have done the right thing in telling you.
- pass on this information to the Designated Person of Fencing Ireland.
- not confront the alleged abuser yourself before seeking guidance from the Designated Person.

Reporting Suspected or Disclosed Child Abuse

When reporting suspected child abuse to the Statutory Authorities, the following procedures should be followed:

- Observe and note dates, times, locations and contexts in which the incident occurred or suspicion was aroused, together with any other relevant information.
- Report the matter as soon as possible to the designated person with responsibility for reporting abuse within Fencing Ireland. If the Designated Person has reasonable grounds for believing that the child has been abused or is at risk of abuse, he or she

will make a report to the Health Service Executive or Social Services who have statutory responsibility to investigate and assess suspected or actual child abuse.

- In cases of emergency, where a child appears to be at immediate and serious risk and the Designated Person is unable to contact a duty social worker, the Gardai or police authorities should be contacted. Under no circumstances should a child be left in a dangerous situation pending intervention by the Statutory Authorities

If the Designated Person is unsure whether reasonable grounds for concern exist he or she can informally consult with the local health board or social services. The Designated Person will be advised whether or not the matter requires a formal report.

A Designated Person reporting suspected or actual child abuse to the Statutory Authorities will first inform the family of their intention to make such a report, unless doing so would endanger the child or undermine an investigation.

The Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act, 1998 provides immunity from civil liability to persons who report child abuse 'reasonably and in good faith' to the Health Service Executive or the Gardai. The act also covers the offence of 'false reporting'.

The main provisions of the Act are:

- The provision of immunity from civil liability to any person who reports child abuse "reasonably and in good faith" to designated officers of Health Service Executive or any member of An Garda Síochána;
- The provision of significant protections for employees who report child abuse. These protections cover all employees and all forms of discrimination up to and including, dismissal;
- The creation of a new offence of false reporting of child abuse where a person makes a report of child abuse to the appropriate authorities "knowing that statement to be false". This is a new criminal offence designed to protect innocent persons from malicious reports.

Allegations Against Sports Leaders

Fencing Ireland has agreed procedures to be followed in cases of alleged child abuse against Sports Leaders. If such an allegation is made against a Leader working within a club, two procedures should be followed:

- The reporting procedure in respect of suspected child abuse (reported by the designated person), see previous page
- The procedure for dealing with the Sports Leader (carried out by the Chairperson of Fencing Ireland or a senior officer, or a person not already involved with the child protection concern)

The safety of the child making the allegation and any others who are or may be at risk should be ensured and this should take precedence over any other consideration. In this

regard, the club should take any steps which may be immediately necessary to protect the child.

The issue of confidentiality is important. Information is on a need to know basis and all parties should be treated with respect and fairness.

The Reporting Procedure

If the designated person has reasonable grounds for concern, the matter should be reported to the local health board or social services, following standard reporting procedures.

The Sports Leader

While the Designated Person makes the report to the local health board, the Chairperson should deal with the Leader in question.

- The Chair should privately inform the leader that (a) an allegation has been made against them and (b) the nature of the allegation. He or she should be afforded an opportunity to respond. His or her response should be noted and passed on to the health board or social services.
- The Leader will be asked to step aside pending the outcome of the investigation. When a person is asked to step aside it should be made clear that it is only a precautionary measure and will not prejudice any later disciplinary proceedings.

Fencing Ireland may consider disciplinary action on the Leader but should ensure that this does not interfere with the investigation of the Statutory Authorities. It is important that consideration be taken of the outcome of the investigation and any implications it might have. The fact that the alleged abuser has not been prosecuted or been found guilty does not mean that they are appropriate to work with young people in the future.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained in respect of all issues and people involved in cases of abuse, welfare or bad practice. It is important that the rights of both the child and the person about whom the complaint has been made are protected.

The following points should be kept in mind:

- A guarantee of confidentiality or undertakings regarding secrecy cannot be given as the welfare of the child will supersede all other considerations.
- All information should be treated in a careful and sensitive manner and should be discussed only with those who need to know.
- Information should be conveyed to the parents or guardians of the child in a sensitive way
- Giving information to others on a 'need to know' basis for the protection of a child is not a breach of confidentiality.

- All persons involved in a child protection process (the child, his or her parents or guardians, the alleged offender, his or her family and Fencing Leaders) should be afforded appropriate respect, fairness, support and confidentiality at all stages of the procedure.
- Information should be stored in a secure place, with limited access only to designated people.
- The requirements of the Data Protection Policy should be adhered to.
- Breach of confidentiality is a serious manner.